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QUARTERLY WEST

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CONJURING

What she doesn't like about him is his laziness and neglectfulness. Sometimes she thinks he only cares about himself. What he doesn't like about her is her seriousness, and how she passes judgment. "Ease up, why don't you," he thinks. What she doesn't like about him is that he gauges a good time and maybe even a friendship by how many laughs he's had, and she realizes sometimes when they get together there's not an excess of laughter or any at all. What he doesn't like about her is her inability to eat all five courses that restaurants in Italy require. What she doesn't like about him is the way he'll let people walk all over him—his landlord, for one, who failed to repair his apartment for six months after a fire, or the doctor whose negligence killed his mother (he didn't sue). When will he feel his penance has been paid, she wants to know. What she doesn't like about him is the way he'll stop calling when she's going through a hard time—he says "he'll wait till things settle down," and all she can think of is having been with him in his pain until she remembers he has a different way of showing care. What he doesn't like about her is her seeming restraint, or is it the stealth by which she keeps her vices hidden, whereas he half-joking, half-proudly says of himself that if he had a patch for each of his addictions, his body would be a quilt. What he doesn't like about her is how strongly she expresses her likes and dislikes, especially with regard to cinema. And sometimes she whines. What he doesn't like about her is her thinking her insights are the truth, as though she knows the whole story. She doesn't really know what he doesn't like about her. It's all guesswork. Nor does he know what she doesn't like about him though in a depression he can conjure many imaginary unlovable traits, but there must be something gained by their not talking about it.

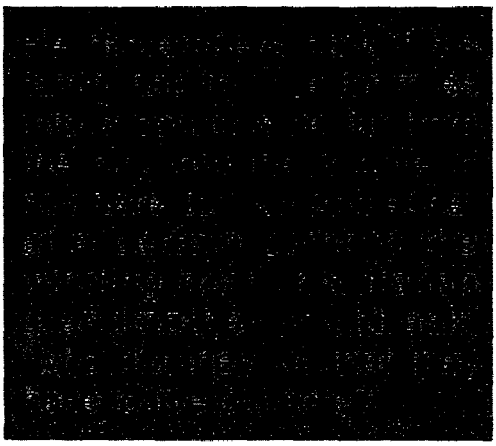
She remembers listening through headphones to the two of them converse. The cassette tape spooled and unwound, tightened and slackened like the ribbon of details that she observed through the train window. Sometimes the voice seemed crowded like a bridge cropped by ivy, playful as a large bird chasing a smaller bird, muffled like brambles interlaced with wires, stark as sheet rock, grainy as cinderblock, loud as graffiti, suddenly high and lowing but not solemn like the bright clapboards of a bell chamber, never quite as real as letters painted onto the surface of a truck, "ADC Supply," or "Watkins and Co." Never as true as the yellow of a hard hat. Variegated, lumbering and uncollected, yards and yards of it. She had taped their conversations because she did not trust her memory, but it made for strange listening especially on conveyances where fellow passengers might be listening to music. She was studying, listening for something and even though his stories made her laugh out loud, even though his reflections and her questions were confirming, their chats in this medium began to sound ghostly—especially if she heard unrecognizable machine sounds in the background—and even boring. It was better when she could hear them eating or when the sounds of the movements of other people were apparent on the tape, a rustle, a chair scraping a floorboard. The tapes came along with a series of photographs she had taken of his apartment, fancying herself a realist painter who must work from life. "I never painted an angel I didn't see." Who said that? The Romantic, Blake? She had forgotten that the work of writing like the work of friendship was a matter of conjuring.

She remembers his mother, Grace, whom

she met, and his Aunt Frances whom she never met. He remembers her mother, Rosemary, whom he met and her Aunt Anna whom he never met.

She remembers driving home filled with relief and joy after handing in a full account of her career for tenure at the university, when, coming upon a yellow circle of daffodils beneath a red stop sign, she thought she might suddenly go blind. How could she drive home from here if she couldn't see? Heart racing, she realized that identifying with him would not help him, even if it meant she loved him.

She remembers too often waiting for him for the dinner engagement, the confirming phone call, the rendezvous, and he fails to come through so she's mad or hurt but he always has an elaborate excuse, and he's sorry, and the story is passionate and convincing, so



she forgives him.

She remembers the way he calmed himself by singing out loud down the winding inclines of the Monte Madonie on the outskirts of Cefalu. Having never spent this much time with him before—a month together abroad—she did not know this as a habit. Sometimes she was thankful for the way it broke the quiet—he couldn't read the signs and she couldn't read the language; sometimes she experienced it as an annoying radio she wished she could turn off. Mostly, it made her try to think of the times she felt like singing.

The way he took her arm in his when he told a story as if to say this is for you, hear me out, we're in this together reminded her of her grandmother Rose. The sense that his coffee-scented house was a workshop where repairs were made out of materials soft and pliable, where hammering might be required as well as thread, reminded her of the company of her grandfather, John, a shoemaker. His habit of eating with gusto and not being shy about announcing what he loved reminded her of her mother, Rosemary. Does this mean that she instantly loved him because she already knew him; or that his spirit grazing against hers opened a familiar grove within her; or that coming into the sphere of each other's influence might conjure the unfinished business of the dead (her mother was still alive) to teach the living about available wonders they failed to see?

She reminded people of their grandmothers. Her eighth grade teacher said so, as well, her first lover. She also attracted elderly women to her and figured there must be some connection between this and what people recognized as her grandmotherlyness.

She remembers how if someone sneezed while someone else was talking, her grandmother would say, "The angel answered," which meant the words that person spoke just then were true. He remembers how if his family had to drive for miles into a countryside far from the city into the middle of nowhere to visit someone, at a certain point in the winding road, his Italian grandmother would ask, "who did they kill that they have to live out here?"

He remembers that grandmother spitting on the floor of the car when they drove past the home of the judge who condemned Sacco and Vanzetti to death. And watching the neck muscles of his father tense at the sound of his grandmother's act.

She remembers a happening in New York that invited people to swish cheap red wine around in their mouths and then spit on the flag of their choice. She watched a very butch woman spit with such force that she sprayed several flags at once with reddish saliva. She herself spit reluctantly at one flag—England,

she thinks—and then, feeling the ridiculous arrogance of being American, she considered spitting at the American flag but instead studied its design and swallowed the wine.

She remembers being so mesmerized by a dramatic performance in a small theater when she was eight that when she went to the bathroom at intermission, she forgot to pull her pants down and peed into them, leading her to forget the performance forever. She remembers a popcorn-like smell rising around her from the damp wood when she returned to her seat, and standing in the car on the way home so as not to soil her neighbor's upholstery.

She is waiting for the paths in the road of her consciousness to come together.

He is waiting for the US to lift its embargo against Cuba so that he and his lover can visit each other freely, and for political and humanitarian reasons too.

Each time she conquers a fear, she seems to forget having done so, so that each time is a new time, repetition being more reassuring than growth.

She remembers hearing a sleigh land in snow on the roof of her house, quick, she forced herself back to sleep so the deliveryman could deliver the packages. She remembers seeing a teary-eyed Jesus come through the ceiling when she was sick, and how no one believed her in the morning.

She forgets the issue that was pressing yesterday. She forgets how what she was reading shaped those days. She forgets how she made the trip last time because this time it seems impossible.

People who like to tell stories rarely also write them. In Sicily, he told so many uniquely irreverent stories in each by-way gelateria where they stopped that she imagined him initiating an entire folklore on the island.

She remembers her mother calling herself, "The Poet of Darby Creek."

He calls her "Olfactory Olga" because of her acute sense of smell. Punning on Trotsky, he calls himself a "tchotchke-ite."

He remembers cooking as a tremendous satisfaction, and he gets angry and upset with himself because the loss of central vision makes the close looking and fine work of preparing food the way he would like impossible. She suggests that she read him recipes and chop while he stirs.

He once said to her: "I feel it in a particular way that whatever I am and whatever I've become and am in the process of trying constantly to become is the result of language..."

He didn't learn to read in other languages as an act in itself but as a medium by which to reach his exotic seeming Italian aunt, as a vehicle to finding men in other countries, as an entrance to an unknown portal of the self, as a form of satisfying mimicry, as a telephone line to his remote but joyful Finnish grandmother.

Maybe five words passed between his Finnish father's mother and himself. She'd taught him the Finnish words for stars and moon, so that, driving her home over a countryside, they could look through the car windows, point, and declare: "tahti, tahti." He wanted so badly to talk to her. She'd told him how to say, "I am a Finnish boy," and he learned the words for "Merry Christmas." Yearning to communicate, he'd say "Merry Christmas" in July.

She didn't so much remember as hear dead languages in her head. They must have been meaningful in some earlier age for someone and she internalized them after which she learned to tolerate their necessary but meaningless sound.

He remembers standing before his favorite window at home and weeping with relief after being told by the doctor that he wouldn't go blind, then being called by his regular surgeon who told him how sorry he was: the young doctor who'd replaced him that day had misread the chart.

She remembered going to his house to take him out of his mourning, and feeling as though a red velvet curtain came down between the display of his tears and her offerings—a pineapple and a marble pound cake from the corner grocer. The curtain was literal not metaphoric, but it still was anybody's

guess when or if it would ever rise on a new day.

He remembers privately crying after the student introduced him to the Kurzweil machine, a scanning device with voice activation that could read to him. Imagine being able to read anything one wanted to. Imagine, he said to her, being able, if I want, to listen to all of the works of Dacia Mariani.

He remembered a bygone world in which people dropped by all hours of day and night.

She remembered a bygone world in which cinema resembled something other than a video game or amusement park plummet, when cinema was seductive rather than assaultive.

His décor was about remembering: politics, history, labor, making ends meet.

Her décor was about remembering how the immigrants brought the outdoors in: a house must have herbs, fruit, plants and other living things.

He remembers using blue and gold crepe paper to prepare his May Altar, adding azalea stems and glitter, dressing and redressing his favorite doll, the infant of Prague, until his parents' living room was transformed into a stage for a gay boy's fancy.

She remembers an English assignment posed in grade school to create your own creature and a story to go along with it. Having devised a butterfly from another planet, she remembers thinking neither *butterfly* nor *alien* were very original ideas, though the words she used to title the story were oddly inventive: "Have You Ever Met the Zurch at Yuletems?"

He remembers fashioning a choirboy out of cardboard for a Christmas contest, and the judges' sighs to see his choirboy's hands and choir music fold outward from his body like a fan. He remembers most making trips with his mother to Worcester's city hall to see his prizewinning choirboy on display.

Reading *Anna Karenina* at ten, she was merely imitating the act of holding something in her lap and looking down into its face. She wasn't reading yet, and yet, what was she doing if not desiring, setting in motion the desire that would make her want to read?

She maintains a naïve fascination with handwritten letters. The choice of lead or ink, the paper's weight and finish, the stamp's insignia, the folds, the seal made by a tongue seem so worth handling, and having, and keeping which she does, in boxes, and believes there is nothing quite like a letter as a trace of a person's life. He still sends her letters, short ones now, in big block print, a postcard from Cuba in Italian signed "Luigi Pirandello."

Reading for him compensated for interior emptiness, feelings of inadequacy, lack of direction. Reading for her usurped the trivial and insignificant, the mindless misplace of interest that threatened to overtake each moment until it became routine.

He believed that if he were reading something serious, he shouldn't sit in a comfortable chair. They agreed this had the incensed aroma of habits formed in church pews. Having been raised in close quarters amid Sturm und Drang of competing desires, she learned to be able to read in any circumstance. This ability to open a book like a window which she stepped up into did not preclude a fondness for different kinds of scenarios, atmospheres, or seating arrangements for different books. But generally she let the book shape the contours of her body rather than the other way around.

He used to use reading as a tonic before sleeping. Reading before sleeping, she finds, adds too many layers to the mystic writing pad of dreams.

Now that he is limited to listening to books, he fears he won't remember what he's heard. The ability to carry out a full-fledged project using the Kurzweil machine will be the test.

She remembers walking home for lunch from Catholic grade school and playing Scrabble with her mother. Most of the time, she asked her mother to confirm which combination of letters were words and which were not.

She remembers carrying all of the neighborhood kids around in her wagon, metallic

handle, a tug-boat feel, red silvery laughter, the smell of sweat. Her mother didn't think she should be the one to do the lugging given her size, and told her not to be a martyr. After that she dreamt she saw the word martyr on a wall but it was mis-spelled: marytr.

He felt he had to appreciate the volunteers who read for Insight Radio, radio for the blind, but their inappropriate cadences, unwanted commentary, their trivial editorializing and mispronunciations led him to reject the service. Once in the middle of reporting a newsmaking event in Spain, the reader paused to mention her own trip to that country, and how the click-click-click of flamenco gave her a headache. Another reader, when confronted with a hard-to-pronounce name, punctuated the obituaries she was reporting

He remembers his mother saying, "Your generation runs off to therapists—my generation, who should have more therapy than me? I should be seeing a therapist every day"... She remembered when consciousness was the pulp and color of crushed bing cherries, unconsciousness the shady skin, the hard pit. Or was it the other way around?

with a string of exasperated "oooh boys!!"

Presently, he teaches himself Spanish using block letters and oversized index cards.

Recently he told her that he made the mistake of going to the new Providence Mall by himself. Unable to locate an exit, he pictured himself crumpled into a heap in a corner of the mall, his body found at day's end alongside his index cards.

He remembers the way his gay friend, Christopher, drove him to school in the wake of the loss of his sight. He'd be wracked with anxiety, and Christopher would let him try to nap on a cot in his office in the hours before he had to enter the classroom. Christopher would get silly with him, until together they'd howl, and it was as though "physiologically, his laughter and my laughter, as a result of it, started some other kind of hormones pushing aside the bad ones, and I'd get through the day." Mornings like this with Christopher made him wake each day and exclaim, "Thank you, goddess, for making me a faggot."

She remembers him telling her about the difficulty of being a visually impaired aging gay man without a partner in the sexual marketplace. One night, a man started up a flirtatious conversation with him in a bar. His banter was enticing, and just as he began to consider seriously his advances, the stranger burst out laughing. "You really don't recognize me, do you child?" He was a friend of a friend, and just wanted to see how bad his eyesight was.

He remembered prior to Stonewall when he discovered his gayness. Involved in SDS at the time, he did political work around anti-war and Civil Rights but had to keep his sexual identity completely hidden from his comrades. He can remember being at SDS meetings on Friday afternoons and then having to make up elaborate lies about where he was going to be that Friday night because he wanted to go to a gay bar. He wonders if that sustaining alternative community is harder or easier to find now.

I'll look commanding and authoritative, she thought, rather than like an Italian pixie that can be pushed around.

I'll look darkly bearded like the men I am drawn to, he thought, rather than like a pigeon-toed fairy.

She tries to remember what she thought she had remembered but forgets.

He didn't remember much about his drinking days and told her to stop reminding him.

She didn't believe in marking life by firsts: "the first time I...," first love, firstly, though

she fantasized being able to say of herself, "and then I began to..."

When he goes away, he sometimes dreams of his balcony back home: palm trees criss-crossed, tied to one another by invisible wire; pillows; hanging things—needing to decide what he is going to do with his life. When she goes away she sometimes has dreams in which her plants appear. Last night, she dreamt that while she was away her Night Blooming Cereus bloomed four times, and her hibiscus plant was so abundant with flowers that she and a fellow gardener friend gasped.

She remembers "thou art such stuff as fools are made of": cartilage, enamel, nails, filament, the stuff, too, that parachutes are made of.

Some jingles endured for decades while others were entirely forgotten: "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should," and "Rice-a-roni, the San Francisco treat" persisted through the years.

He remembers how, as his Roman lover, Daniele, grew older, he translated his fatigue into a cosmic view by saying death is not far off, but it's ok because "*ci stanno piu di la che di qua*," meaning "there are more of them over there than here," more loved ones on the other side than still living.

He can't cross something like the Tappan Zee bridge without being in awe of the technical, practical feat, an amazement of forces and groups and skills that needed to come together, reminding him that there is no intellectual work without manual work. She can't cross something like the Tappan Zee bridge without noticing how its arcs and ridges remind her of something in nature, ebbs and flows, cliffs and plummets, ascensions and calibrations like the stages of a bloom, leaf vectors, at which point she fears running from her car and leaping into the idea of a metaphysic, some primal merging.

"What my eyes can't do anymore, my mouth can," he told himself.

A book used as a doorstop, to hold open a door: this image, which came to her in a dream, seemed to solve the enigma of the book she was writing altogether.

"I flow through the landscape and nobody perceives me as disabled." He is glad that people don't respond to him with pity, curiosity, or fright.

He pointed out to her the ways in which the figure from her past who seemed tyrannical was also loving. She pointed out the ways the figure from his past who seemed loving was also tyrannical. He tried to get her to understand their plight. She tried to get him to understand their choices.

He remembers his mother saying, "Your generation runs off to therapists—my generation, who should have more therapy than me? I should be seeing a therapist every day." She remembers her mother saying, "Don't think once, don't think twice, think thrice before walking down the aisle," and how it seemed like the kitchen sink always brought on tears. Her mother would cry into the dishwater: "He took the best years of my life. He took my youth."

She remembered when consciousness was the pulp and color of crushed bing cherries, unconsciousness the shady skin, the hard pit. Or was it the other way around?

Presently, if he can't sleep, he warms steamed apples and brown sugar, which he calls "crustless apple pie," or mixes lite jello pudding with skim milk and raisins. Resisting things that are gooey, sweet, fattening or rich, he mixes four yogurts together with jello and bananas. This brings the blood from his head to his stomach, and before he knows it, he's snoozing.

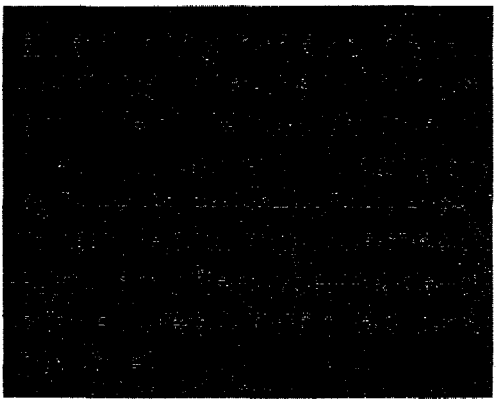
"How would you decide to put posters on the ceiling?"

"I ran out of wall space," you reply.

"It's nice, but there's not a comfortable chair to sit on," your mother, Grace, complains, and she exhumes a word from the 1950s: "it's dizzy."

"It's a game I'm playing," you say, "It gave me a tremendous thrill to place that [indicating a new tchotchke] somewhere in my house."

Alongside a white valence fringed by delicate threads, a yellow sign blurts through a bullhorn: "Feed the People/Not the Pentagon." You frame the photos of revolutionaries whose faces line your tables alongside of or in place of pictures of relatives: Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, Karl Marx, Grace; Sacco and Venzetti, Che Guevera, Antonio Gramsci, Grace. I once tried to photograph a friend who was sympathetic to your commie ways alongside of your image of Gramsci, but Sidney's face got lost in the surround: a thriving fern sprouts from his head; a gold-gilded image of Rome overpowers the scene; opalescent china reflects faux grapes; two carefully balanced candlesticks to which you have attached tiny lampshades frame a carved alabaster lamp of the Three Graces. "It's the culmination of a tendency," you say, "I can't control myself." And, I say, as I always do of you, "You are too much, too much."



You collect progressive slogans, bits of lace with matching plaster putti, lampshades and baskets, occasionally baskets that you make into lampshades, lace that you make into drapes, bowls that you make into planters. I collect directives that I pen in a journal. Imagine looking at them altogether. Imagine watching them accrete to form a self-construction. Would anyone let themselves see that? Is there such a thing as a journal that isn't a preposterous embarrassment of the secrets that solitude creates and the self that will follow one to the grave?

There is no turning back, only forward.

Try to be in the moment.

Embrace that part that wants to celebrate.

Consider making a project with someone else.

Marshal resources.

Cultivate serenity.

Correspond.

Believe in an unchanging center.

Listen to others. Study faces.

Rise to a level of stillness.

Show vulnerabilities and ask friends for help with them.

Be more direct.

Sit back and watch the fireworks display.

Cultivate fantasies of flying.

Take more risks.

Come to writing as to dancing.

Open.

Use meditation to have rather than resolve a feeling.

Eat more sweets.

Follow the stream even in its uncertain or fretful digression.

Notice the clarity of shapes.

Sit with others on a wide blanket of earth, breathing.

Invite people to go for walks in the open vale in your mind.

In the dream I thought: I need to make contact with something green on Fridays.

Go for walks in the neighborhood and get to know shopkeepers.

Insight comes suddenly like sheets of rain.

The rooms in your house flood with your creations, and it starts to seem possible to name them and to love the names of things, or to love the way that you have made the things so unlike their names.

Suspend a basket from a ceiling.

Address statuary: Dante's Francesca; angel carrying bowl-like torch soap dish; John the Baptist fondling Christ; Putti cross-legged, reading books; Victory leading the people; gargoyle holding red communist candle.

Read: *Moby Dick*; *Notes of a Native Son*; *Das Kapital*; *One Life to Live* by Zsa Zsa Gabor.

Tack fringe.

Iron, fold, cordon lace.

Adjust lamplight.

Train plants to spiral upward.

Juxtapose the elegance of old hotels and 1960s radicalism.

Treat thresholds as gateways and lavish attention accordingly.

Transform blocked off staircase into gazebo.

Shake out, hang, gather lace.

Terrace posters: Black History Speaks; Rhode Island Labor History Society; Palazzi Di Roma. Sweep beard trimmings into waste basket plastered with images of Rome.

Line bathtub with blue tiles to create impression of depth.

Re-pot white clove carnations.

Create devices that, once tripped, will drench visitors with lace.

Rinse bowtie pasta in sieve, rinse grapes in sieve, rinse cappelini, penne, in sieve, rinse white beads of rice, outer casing of green beans, rinse cherries in sieve, rinse eyeglasses, suspenders, darkness, lace, dusty with time, in sieve.

Repair sash.

Commit to valences.

Trample rugs under foot.

Finger, consider, recognize, reorganize lace.

Somewhere in Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*, I'd read, "And everywhere were little things that break," but I thought I had said it about your place. Everything breaks here. Nothing breaks. Things smolder, yellow-rimmed, they coil upward in candlelight or in table-light turned to low. Abhorring overhead light, so often you made a smile break open across my face.

She was wearing skorts—a cross between shorts and a skirt—the ten-year-old who she once was. Paisley red skorts, blue pointed sneakers, and a sleeveless white polyester turtleneck. Hedged around by tomato plants, she was demonstrating to her immigrant grandfather how to use a hula hoop. He was wearing plaid yellow shorts that reached beneath his knees, heavy brown sandals, a white T-shirt that looked like a ripped rag. "Go like this and move your hips, grandpop," swivet, swivet, the beads that line the inside of the hoop spoke in the space between them like cicadas. Normally her grandfather would have a cigarette glued to his lower lip, but he was dying of lung cancer now and not allowed to smoke. She and her mother visited him daily so her mother could read to him: Dante, Nazim Hikmet, the Philly poets she was discovering, or herself. Today the grandchild insisted they go outdoors, into the unweeded garden, to play. The grandfather laughed lightly; he can't lift his arm to bring the hoop over his head, so he stoops, "here it comes," he says, and rolls the plastic pink spokeless wheel across the lawn to her.

Presently she wears grey pedal pushers in a widening body, black sandals with orthopedic inserts, and a sleeveless cotton v-neck jersey. She is visiting the Northwest, staying in a stranger's house and tending his garden. She enjoys watering and clipping but is reluctant to weed. Sighting dandelion, she considers how bitter the leaves must taste, their tenacious force.

Drift wood burning, the scent of it wafting like a wave-smoothed clam turning in the sand, crackling; a yellow studebaker, untouched and silken as a milkshake; evergreen hedges, trimmed, paper cutouts into the landscape, lush beneath the mist of distant mountains; the top of an umbrella fronting the vast view through the window like the dome of a sheltering church: these were the pieces of a place that might comprise the memory of those who lived here but not of her.

Playing with her niece in this landscape, she wonders what the four-year-old will remember: she rocks her niece in a hammock beneath a cherry tree and asks her to describe what she sees. "Something shiny," she says. "Is it light?" she asks. "Leaves and flowers, I see the sky," the child says. "I love my hammock," she says, and she remembers rocking her four years earlier in a bassinet while her Russian grandmother told the story of her

life. "Let's play horseshoes," the child suggests, and they laugh together at the clumsiness with which the horseshoe thumps onto gravel, but when it rings its peg, they jump. "I'm exhausted" she says, and the child procures a paintbrush and proceeds to "paint" the aunt. She runs a horsehair brush over her temples, across her eyelids, round her cheeks, she dabs her ears. "I love being painted," she murmurs to her niece's concentrated smile, and resigns herself to remember this forever.

Too bad memory doesn't ebb and flow. It's like the curved and hollow interior of a stringed instrument. Depending on the force or feeling with which a string were struck, depending on the tune requested by the audience, something within might stir or echo, something might come out in the song.

Everyone was looking at the same burial ground, paean to a tightly knit community, but he remembered the Italian socialist whose body the church refused.

Everyone admired her pearly shoes and crinoline dress. But she only enjoyed the orchid and the feeling of her grandmother's fingers at her shoulder as she neatly pushed the pin that held it there through the cotton mesh.

Everyone was looking at the same family album, admiring Aunt Frances' bold floral print dress, but he remembered his Aunt telling the story of mistakenly wearing a robe which she thought was a dress to school. He identified with her shame as well the hearty laugh with which she told the tale.

Everyone admired her uncle's precise filming of the Veteran's Day Parade in 1950, but she noticed a ribbon trailing from a cap, pulled by the force of the wind to jump across and then along the edges of the image he had shot.

Every man was watching a game and smoking a stogie, but he preferred to sit around the table in the kitchen with the women and listen to their stories. Later, he discovered a saying he enjoyed, "*a tavola non s'invecchia mai*"—"at the table, one never grows old."

Everyone admired her aunt's shapeliness in a red dress through the years, but she latched onto her rough hands and begged her to let her knead with her, or weed the garden, or beat the dust out of the rug until their thoughts were true and free and clear.

Everyone saw a gentle man in the photo of her father, but she glimpsed in the window the tip of a tornado funnel, the disembodied form of his rage coming on.

If only memory came together like puzzle pieces or a cartoonish lock and key with wings. No. It took the form of a fork placed next to a flower, a piece of toast alongside a wind sail.

If you blinked it could be gone. Or, it could blot: your mind, the paper-sponge soaking the mark indelibly.

It had no nature, but the use of flash cards or traffic signs could provoke a confirmation from it.

For her, memory took the form of voices in an outer room.

It was always rimmed or ringed around by some indefinable substance like a pupil to its iris.

It could be a secure pocket of aloneness except when it was the form of a hideous reminder of what she couldn't face.

She liked remembering with him. She liked the kind of remembering they did together, like placing and replacing the bright red satin ribbon that marked the pages of a raucous, irreverent book about artful, self-denying martyrs, holy, humble, generous, visionary drama queen outsiders. Call it a *Lives of the Saints.*